

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NEW DELHI 007709

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/07/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: THE BJP: NO PLANS TO ADDRESS LONG-TERM PROBLEMS

REF: A. NEW DELHI 7389

[B](#). NEW DELHI 7088

[C](#). NEW DELHI 6998

Classified By: PolCouns Geoffrey Pyatt, Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The BJP is not taking advantage of the Winter session of Parliament (December 1-23) to demonstrate its effectiveness as India's leading opposition party. Our conversations with senior BJP leaders in recent weeks indicate that the party is not addressing its internal problems and has no strategy to return to power. It confronts the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) on the streets and in Parliament, but has yet to develop a positive vision for India. Privately its leaders express optimism about the party's prospects, but concede that the UPA is likely to remain in power for some time to come. The UPA record to date has not without problems and has provided openings for opposition attacks, but the BJP will not present a serious challenge to the government until it resolves the many internal problems it is sweeping under the rug. End Summary.

#### Parliament Gets Off to a Rocky Start

-----

[1](#)2. (C) The winter session of Parliament (December 1-23) provides an opportunity for the BJP to demonstrate its effectiveness as an opposition party. Its actions in the first few days of the session, however, revealed a party in disarray and searching for a coherent strategy to counter the UPA government.

[1](#)3. (U) During the current session, Parliament is scheduled to address up to 46 bills on a wide variety of subjects, including the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) and a high-profile employment guarantee law. MPs are also scheduled to discuss appropriate responses to increased attacks by Maoist groups, the prospect of talks between the GOI and Kashmiri separatists, ongoing violence in the state of Manipur, and the recent arrest of a prominent Hindu mystic, the Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati. Despite the packed Parliamentary agenda, expectations are low, as BJP disruption has prevented the previous two sessions from enacting much business. Parliament's first day met expectations, as MPs from rival parties engaged in free-for-alls, forcing the speaker to dismiss the house early.

#### Democracy: Not a Pretty Picture

-----

[1](#)4. (U) During the opening session, members of the Bihar-based Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) made personal attacks against BJP President Advani, alleging that he had mistreated his daughter-in-law. MPs from the Dalit-based BSP left their seats to loudly protest the recent arrest of one of their delegation in Uttar Pradesh (UP), called for the GOI to dissolve the state government led by Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, and only stopped shouting after the Speaker threatened them with suspension. The Left/Communist parties accused the UPA of "not consulting" prior to increasing the price of petroleum products, implying that the price rise was unjustified. The BJP accused Congress of betraying its election slogan of "Congress is with the Common Man," before leading an opposition walkout.

[1](#)5. (U) The arrest of the Kanchi Sankaracharya dominated the second day of proceedings, with the BJP raising the issue in both houses. BJP firebrand Sushma Swaraj claimed to be "anguished" over the treatment of what she described as "a 2,500 year old religious institution." Alleging involvement of the GOI and the UPA government in Andhra Pradesh (AP) in the Shankaracharya's arrest, she demanded the transfer of the case out of Tamil Nadu, and GOI intervention "to ensure proper treatment" of the Shankaracharya. The UPA responded that it had nothing to do with the arrest, while the Tamil Nadu government accused Swaraj of "misleading the house." Tempers ran high throughout the session, with MPs frequently interrupting speakers with heckling and catcalls.

#### The BJP Takes to the Streets

-----

[1](#)6. (U) On December 1 the BJP, decrying UPA economic policies as "anti-people," held a protest march to parliament. In his speech at the rally, former PM Vajpayee said his government

had kept inflation under check, increased the per capita income, achieved robust economic growth and launched major infrastructural development projects. He contrasted this with the state of the economy under the UPA, which he claimed had "no control over rising prices." BJP leaders also criticized the UPA for distorting the Indian government by establishing a "super Prime Minister" (Sonia Gandhi), filling the Cabinet with corrupt and criminal ministers, and taking a "soft approach" to terrorism in J&K and India's Northeast.

#### Uma's Letter Bomb

-----

17. (SBU) Another indication of the deep divisions within the BJP leadership was a letter written by BJP firebrand and former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Uma Bharati. Excerpts from the letter were published in the most recent edition of "Outlook" magazine. Bharati implies that Advani who "used to roar like a lion," has lost his charisma, while party General Secretary Pramod Mahajan has "only one goal,...to come into power and then to make money," and former party President Venkaiah Naidu "made menopause a national issue," when he cited his wife's "illness" as the reason for his resignation. BJP leaders have insisted that Bharati is being "rehabilitated" and would soon rejoin the ranks following her recent suspension. But her caustic letter attacks much of the party leadership in terms that would make further cooperation extremely difficult.

18. (C) Two BJP functionaries confirmed to us that the letter is authentic. Bharati had written the letter and given it to a confidant to release to the press should her reinduction not take place, but he reportedly leaked it prematurely. According to our informants, Bharati was to be reinducted into the party as early as December 2, but when the letter was leaked, angry second tier leaders demanded that she be kept out, and Advani complied.

#### The Hindutva MP

-----

19. (C) Ramakrishna Kusumaria is a BJP MP from Madhya Pradesh (MP). Known to be a follower of Uma Bharati, Kusumaria represents the Hindutva wing of the party. In a conversation with Poloff on December 3, he blamed the BJP's secular-oriented moderates and their National Democratic Alliance (NDA) allies for the fall of the BJP government, saying they insisted on calling an early election and failed to present the party's "values" (Hindutva) in a compelling manner. Despite this, he insisted the party would rebuild. He claimed that since the BJP represents Indian nationalism, its leaders reflect the country's religious values and that because "time is on our side," the BJP will return to power stronger than ever.

110. (C) Pointing to the recent induction of Shibu Soren, who is under indictment for two murder cases, and other "tainted ministers" into the cabinet, and the increasingly heated dispute between Railway Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav and former Railway Minister Ramvilas Paswan, Kusumaria alleged that the UPA is basically hypocritical and corrupt. He also accused the UPA of claiming to be "the party of the common man," while dismantling effective NDA programs that extended credit to the rural poor and developed India's infrastructure. According to Kusumaria, the BJP is best able to tackle corruption and bring economic relief to the poor, and this will become clear to the voter.

111. (C) Kusumaria conceded that, the UPA will likely remain in power for a full five-year term, as the BJP will need time to "rebuild." He also acknowledged that Vajpayee will not return as PM and did not mention Advani as his successor. Ruling out the prospect that the next BJP PM will come from the party's secular wing, Kusumaria said it would be a "holy" person and the party would make the decision at the appropriate time.

#### The Youth Leader

-----

112. (C) Dharmendra Pradhan is a rising star within the BJP and was recently named to head the party's Youth Wing. A native of Orissa, he represents a central Orissa constituency. Speaking with Poloff on December 3, he called the UPA "inherently unstable," predicting that it could fall at any time, and asserting that the BJP is ready to return to power at a moment's notice, with Vajpayee as its standardbearer. According to Pradhan, the Left/Communists are the UPA's weak link, as they can bring down the government at will. He claimed that prominent Left leaders told him they were "disgusted" with Congress and the UPA, and were only supporting them to keep the BJP out of power.

113. (C) Pradhan also claimed that Left leaders tell him privately that globalization is inevitable and they want only to ensure that its consequences are distributed fairly.

According to Pradhan, the Left leaders are inherently parochial and only want to maintain power in their "red forts" -- Tripura, Kerala, West Bengal. Congress must concede these states to the Left, he said, or they will bring down the UPA.

14. (C) According to Pradhan, Congress mismanagement is providing the opposition BJP with many issues. He insisted that BJP would get lots of mileage out of the arrest of the Shankaracharya. Noting that the BJP was an "ideological, cadre-based" party, Pradhan asserted it would find an issue to "unite the majority community, (Hindus)" and that once this is accomplished, it will have a lock on government. He asserted that the BJP will continue to attack the UPA on its economic performance, and contrasted the treatment of the Shankaracharya with that of the "tainted ministers." How could it be, he asked rhetorically, that Shibu Soren is accused of murder and put on the cabinet, while the Shankaracharya is placed in a jail cell?

15. (C) Pradhan acknowledged that the BJP has not selected a second tier leader to fill the number three slot behind Vajpayee and Advani. Like Kusumaria, he downplayed the succession issue, claiming that the party would solve it when the time came. Pradhan also denied that there is inherent tension within the party between the Hindutva wing and the pro-development wing, claiming that the party supported both objectives. He conceded that the BJP's behavior in the last two parliamentary sessions was a mistake, and predicted the party would behave in a more responsible manner in Parliament to address issues of government and national policy.

#### A Response from Congress

16. (C) Speaking with Poloff on December 3, Congress MP Rashid Alvi (a Muslim) laughed off the BJP challenge, saying that the opposition has only one issue and came to power on the public's momentary fascination with the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and the novelty of Hindutva. In Alvi's view, such emotional appeals quickly fade, the public has lost interest, and the BJP has nothing else to offer. He predicted that the BJP would continue to decline, and the NDA alliance would eventually break up and disappear.

17. (C) Alvi revealed that Congress is far more worried about Mulayam Singh Yadav and his Samajwadi Party (SP), than the BJP. According to Alvi, Mulayam has approached DMK Party Chief Muthavel Karunanidhi to convince him to pull his party out of the UPA government and join with the SP to form a new government. Karunanidhi's departure would leave the UPA without a parliamentary majority. Alvi claimed that Karunanidhi was not interested in the proposal, which cannot succeed without support from the Communists. Alvi opined that while some Communists have pro-SP sympathies and would like to sever ties with Congress and the UPA, most have discovered that Mulayam is an unprincipled opportunist and no longer want to work with him. He predicted that the UPA would remain in power for the next few years and easily brush off BJP challenges.

#### Comment

18. (C) The BJP's behavior and the private statements of its MPs do little to convince us that the party has overcome its problems or has a strategy to regain power. Instead, it continues to paper over factional disputes, disrupt Parliament, postpone the leadership/succession issue, avoid a decision on the next Prime Ministerial candidate, and defer any program to win state level elections in February 2005. Many in the BJP appear content to wait for the UPA to self-destruct or make a serious mistake that will provide an opening for attack. The UPA has presented such opportunities in the form of price increases of basic commodities and nominations to the Cabinet of persons with records of criminality and corruption. However, Indian voters for now seem unconvinced that the BJP has a better track record or will behave differently should it return to power.

MULFORD